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The Politics of Intervention -- Panama and U.S. Grand Strategy for
The Trans-Century Politico-military Environment

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The Panama intervention by the United States in December 1989 was not as atypical as many who argue for cuts in conventional forces would maintain. Several political elements of the US-Panamanian conflict will be widely present in the coming century. An examination of the origins and conduct of the crisis points to some lessons for US strategy and political goals in the 1990's and beyond. The international, regional and domestic politics of the intervention are complex. This was at heart a clash of political cultures, but the views which clash are hard to put into words precisely because the cultures are different. Some hypotheses aimed at dissecting if not fully understanding what Noriega's strategy was and how the crisis played out may shed light on this and future situations leading to intervention. They also lead us to the assumptions which tell a Third-World state intervention is not coming; that defiance of a more powerful state or wider rules is viable.

The hypothetical assumptions also suggest a more effective politico-military strategy for the US in the "post-Soviet" world. If the US is to preserve its sovereignty and prosperity, it can best do so in a world not dominated by players in the nation-state game who artificially restrict access to elections, basic rights, information, energy, trade or resources by any citizen or state. In a word, democracies. This form of political organization is on average less likely to restrict access to these valued "resources".

This implies that we shall not be able to "declare victory", demobilize and withdraw from global responsibilities in parallel with the USSR. They own most of Eurasia. They can afford continental, even isolationist, behavior and random global political developments. Even with a North American free market, the US remains an island and must therefore preserve a nation-state system hospitable to its interests. This will sometimes mean intervention. Hence the need for a military strategy which includes hard-hitting, global conventional forces.

The Panama case shows in detail some of the political pathology which we shall face in the future, as well as how to deflect or defeat it. We have traditionally been tolerant of some

deflect or defeat it. We have traditionally been tolerant of some deviations from global norms, allowing populations to suffer "domestic" atrocities, in part because we faced a (now declining) global adversary. Often our primary need was for a particular base or transit right. These and other geostrategic needs can now be tempered more with principle. Without an omnipresent, consistent threat, allies can be encouraged to trust their people more.

Hostile regimes too have been tolerated as we faced bigger challenges. Though in many sense illegitimate, they had limited reach, could not harm our more direct interests, and could be contained on an *ad hoc* basis. This will be a luxury we cannot afford in a future which promises military challenges we have not faced in interventions. The transcentury Third World military environment will include the threat of advanced missilery through the ballistic level; exotic warheads up through NBC technologies; and eventually beam and directed energy systems.

Democracy is no guarantee of more productive Third World spending or peaceful policy, but it is a good brake on the personal ambition and popular enthusiasm which characterize subregional politics in the South and East. Patience will also be less risky, longer-term opposition more workable, and collective sanctions more feasible without an active, global political opposition.

Where we must intervene, we will do well to have made an important distinction first: we breach the sovereignty of no people, but rather restore sovereignty from armies and governments to peoples. Elevating this from tactic to grand strategy would pay political and military dividends in the coming century. Often thought of as a recipe for excessive and useless intervention in a world averse to democracy, it would be less utopian in a global climate of popular democracy. Such a climate is now gaining momentum, with Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Subcontinent now all but secured. What is needed is a global sense that there will be a force to gradually but steadily maintain the momentum. The dominant power in an essentially monopolar conventional world could provide that steady pressure.

Origins of the Panama Crisis

The problem resolved by the Panama intervention was that a nation state, enjoying sovereignty, had been taken over or cartelized by a personalist and outlaw faction. Acting for personal gain with national instruments and benefits, to the detriment of the interests of the Panamanian people and in abrogation of basic rights, the regime of General Manuel Noriega promised to further solidify the nature and control of that regime in Panama. More dangerous than a simple cult of ego or a non-constitutional military regime, the Noriega government fused several threats of the coming decades: negative/extremist nationalism, exclusivism, corruption, resistance to international norms, resource scarcities, and deliberate marginalization.

Nationalism: Negatively expressed as jingoism or fanaticism regarding an external enemy, nationalism diverts national energy from growth. It distorts a maximizing foreign policy of pursuing the nation's basic interests toward one of "punishing" another player without gain. The goal is purely psychological, the damage to concrete interests quite real.

Exclusivism: Nativist and purification movements, intolerant religious fundamentalism, and other exclusivist groups will use the nation state as their sword. Positively expressed, ethnicity adds texture and depth to life. In a 21st century which many predicted would be a world community, the irony is that, unable to cope with change or to produce self-sustaining growth and prosperity in the face of severe social stress, many societies will turn inward and backward and then lash out at others. Exclusivism is not always local -- a widespread language such as Spanish represents a wider cultural identification ("*hispanidad*"), and can define a we/they cultural line which conflicts with other "universal" norms.

Corruption: Corruption of officials of sovereign countries will need attention under international law. It is presently tolerated

under territorial sovereignty and *de facto* recognition doctrines because the world community has chosen to pay this price to avoid interstate conflict. The small nation cannot be expected on its own to resist the pressures of major narcotics cartels. Those pressures normally come both as a combination of threat and funds of unprecedented scale. The alternative is death, usually after one's family. They offer first life itself, then power: arms and transport, banking and influence. Politically more importantly, it offers a leader or power group instant and growing control of resources at home, a ready way to seize power, with the promise of more influence internationally in a system which emphasizes the sovereign equality of states and non-interference in internal affairs. The system will have to reexamine its priorities as nations acquire weapons of mass destruction and criminal enterprises see their control within their grasp. Ironically, small states which have relied on tying the hands of large states may come to feel that their safety lies rather in large states ready to preserve their real sovereignty against threats from sub-state actors.

Resistance to Norms: Many third world states resist norms of international behavior on the theory that the Northern Hemisphere wrote the rules of the international game in the last century and they must be put right. Thus, they may bend the rules given their new nationhood. This excuses high crimes against neighbors. This makes all local wars just but any extra-regional military action illicit.

Scarcities: Every state straddles one or more resources, be they natural or manmade. Oil states in particular have learned that they can restrict supply and thereby raise price in the face of constant demand. Even a US base or access rights to a base are a scarce resource subject to blackmail, and "cartels" are emerging in the form of consultations among base-rights negotiating countries. In general, site-specific resources are less motivating than the world believes. While many would see the Panama Canal as a first-order resource, it was more likely a secondary priority except in long-run terms in the US decision to intervene in Panama.

Overall, however, states need to take into account the denial of a resource -- political denial leads to political response.

Marginalization: a state loses its incentive to be a constructive member of the international community as it is marginalized -- deprived of influence and prosperity. Economics may lead to marginalization by devaluation of its products or services -- deadly for a single-product economy. With nothing to trade, its gains from the world economy drop. So do its incentives to allow free trade, protect foreigners and make good its obligations of all kinds. Politically, marginalization can be imposed by a hostile country (US sanctions against Noriega) when it dominates the external trade of a country. It can also be encouraged from within, by actions which create a lack of confidence or direct measures which discriminate against foreigners or otherwise put distance between the country and the world economy. The politician benefits, the people suffer. As in denial of a resource, a political decision to instigate or further marginalization to gain or maintain political power is a political act to which political response can be expected.

Why Intervention:

Sovereignty and The State Which Values Conflict

Noriega's path to conflict was sealed by his basic political need for an external enemy. Already an outlaw regime undermining the interests of the Panamanian people, he felt that his control could only be consolidated and maintained if he kept tensions with the United States high. Internationally, that regime was showing little restraint. Those who attribute an element of easily offended egotism to US behavior should recall that the regime of General Omar Torrijos was more stridently nationalistic and gained much from the United States -- the agreement to turn over the Panama canal. Also a military government, that of Torrijos followed National Guard overthrow of elected President Arnulfo Arias. Torrijos, however, achieved some populist/nationalist support. Oppression was not as overt during his rule. Moreso. than under Torrijos, nationalism was fanned by Noriega and

personalized in *Yanqui-baiting*. Noriega seem indeed to have an increasing appetite for conflict with the United States. He counted too much on a political psychology which distorts the North American relationship with Latin America.

With regional variations, this set of attitudes characterizes Third World political response to crises and points to failures of communication at critical junctures. A rational-actor model is assumed. It may be inapplicable at points, but a non-rational actor model explains nothing; finds no patterns. Many patterns of behavior which lay behind threats to US national interests are dismissed as non-rational when in fact they are particularistic or specific to a certain cultural or political frame of mind. The 21st century will see an expansion of such mindsets, not the single global culture once envisioned. In the Panama case, several unique political perspectives fused as follows in hypothetical idea sets which have not yet been fully articulated by those who act upon them, muchless understood by their political opponents:

Hispanidad: The New World culture which speaks Spanish is infinitely diverse, but shares linguistic identity and therefore a specific window on reality. This collective perspective expresses itself formally in international politics not so much at the OAS (seen as an adversarial proceeding with the US and English-speaking Caribbean) as in the Latin American Group (*GRULA*) at the UN. There and even in bilateral policy there prevails a behavior pattern in which Latin States practice their own specially-tailored international norms. These have as their psychological core the proud 500-year confrontation with the English-speaking peoples ... largely forgotten history in the North but built into the Hispanic cultural optic. The Northern cultures in general are not foreign but alien, seen as perversely diverging from long traditions, rootless. Norms propagated by the North as universal are perceived as culturally-intrusive, polluting, tainted with self-interest. The proponents come through as sermonizing and self-righteous, yet lacking spirituality, patience, dignity, solid foundations. In the Hispanic worldview, cultural conservatism prevails no matter what one's politics. "Race" as the term is used in Spanish to designate

the language group is identifying, wholistic and unitary. Positive political expressions which provide a window on this worldview are the deeply felt needs to reincorporate Cuba and Puerto Rico into the system of Latin states -- ignoring what the North considers outlaw behavior in one case, self-determination in the other. That a Latin people could be excluded because of its "interventionism", or that another could choose not to be a sovereign Latin state, is internally incomprehensible -- inconsistent with the political/cultural self-identification that is *hispanidad*.

Intervention: The core value in Latin American international law and politics is absolute territorial sovereignty, expressed in the Estrada Doctrine that there are no grounds for nonrecognition of an established government. Hence, there are no grounds for intervention in the affairs of any State -- all matters being internal. The state is more identified with the government than with sovereignty of the people. There is a longstanding basic conflict here with US foreign policies which have led to intervention both for reasons of state (interests) and policy (pro-active values and *international* although admittedly not *universal* norms). Even were intervention justifiable, it must simply correct the wrong, not change the Government. Noriega derived great diplomatic benefit, on which he relied excessively, from the Latin reluctance to condemn the nature of a fellow Latin regime. The Latin American political circuit is quick to warn against the use of economic pressure or military force in any situation of conflicting interests. As a major subsystem of global politics, with its own understandings and rules, the region's foremost unstated value is that values do not apply in questions of sovereignty -- one may question and even collectively sanction a state's behavior, but never the source of that behavior, its governing regime. The nature of a *de facto* ruling individual or group is not to be questioned, muchless changed. Thus despite a willingness of many Latin American governments to admit that Noriega was a criminal and a usurper of power, the OAS could not bring itself to take effective action against a sitting head of government.

High Intervention Threshold: A further contributing line of Latin American political logic runs: Having intervened in the past in the region, and been criticized for it by the region, the US will avoid intervention at almost any cost. The more visible the need to intervene, the longer-running the crisis, the higher the volume of caveats not to intervene, the greater this protection is supposed to be. This notion should have been dispensed with by now. The US has used its global armed forces some 200 times since WWII to influence political events. Right in Noriega's sub-region we had intervened in Guatemala, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Grenada. He himself aided the Contra program. Central America had become a focus of US foreign policy. The circum-Caribbean region is clearly of high security interest to the US; the Canal moreso. Noriega's escalatory and deliberate hostility to the US, his almost gratuitous defiance and blindness to what was coming borders on the unbelievable -- unless one reasons that the US cannot strike militarily at a Latin American Republic. The Hemisphere's values make this an absolute rule. Many in the US domestic context mirror it and believe it to be international law, and extremists to the South count on that Fifth Column. Thus, Latin States may act on their interests, even to exceeding international norms or denying universal freedoms, but the US is enjoined from giving force to its interests or to universal norms. Neither self-defense under the UN charter nor maintenance of the international system are legitimate for the North.

The Sensitive Countries: Panamanian judgment may have been further clouded by the presumption that countries which have had turbulent relations with the US are somehow more proof against intervention. Panamanians in particular have always felt that the US has a special obligation to their sovereignty given that the US in effect created Panama from Colombia to create the Panama canal. Thus the US has duties there but no rights.

Right Bad, Left Immune: There is an unspoken, widespread but perhaps declining normative judgment in Latin culture that leftist, "progressive" policies are the way of the future and somehow to be protected and valued as a bulwark against everything from

subversion to internal revolt. Conservative regimes are labeled antihistorical and somehow un-Latin. Conservative parties are never so named -- using republican terminology or simply abstract colors or historic names. Left is abstractly good and inherently Latin. The logic is twisted. It defies history, as we are down to one communist regime in the Hemisphere, and the Central American republics have all now elected conservative presidents, mirroring the Tory revolution in the Northern Hemisphere. Yet Mexico, for example, continues to practice capitalism and domestic repression while preaching a leftist foreign policy for protective coloration. Here we may be getting at the real appeal of leftist rhetoric and doctrine -- not that it is truly or innately Latin but that it is innately anti-American. This was certainly grasped by Noriega who maintained a balancing act between Cuba/Nicaragua and the US -- what Latin foreign ministries in declining US demarches to vote with us on global issues refer to as equidistance. Underlying this is a cultural assumption that no matter how parallel the values of our two cultures, a certain distance must be kept from the US. In operation, the concept goes even further than the preposterous idea of moral equivalence: the superpowers are judged equally alien Northern cultures, neither wanted in Latin American life. Neither is seen as disinterested or benevolent, and one has real reach in the Western Hemisphere. So one tilts slightly toward the East.

Close=Friendly: Noriega may have deluded himself that his former intelligence association with the US government, as the National Guard chief of intelligence (G-2) protected him. He severely confused closeness to US operations with identification with US interests and values. In a culture which puts primacy on personal power and conspiratorial exchange of influence over national norms and obligations, his view was consistent. Tolerated for years, he lost sight of what Americans thought of him personally. Noriega should have seen that his own shift from accomplice to public opponent would end any sense of obligation to him; that his office not he had been useful to the US but in misusing it he set up an inevitable confrontation.

Bipolarity: Noriega still saw the world in bipolar terms, not realizing that without a muscular international communist movement it is now outmoded strategy to play the US off against the Soviets. With the risk of losing the Canal or Central America to an ideological opponent declining geometrically, the US could indulge second-order concerns. Narcotics was a key concern, with both domestic and international claims on the national security agenda. More centrally, the US could also be more consistent, principled and aggressive about its political values, leaning toward active support of electoral democracy as well as human rights.

The primary US interest/value which was freed for more prominence in policy terms was formal electoral democracy and human rights. Noriega denied both with an openness and disregard for Hemispheric opinion which was striking. Even regional norms of extra tolerance within the cultural community (*hispanidad*) could not constrain Latin criticism of his annulling elections and beheading opposition. Similarly, Noriega made no pretense of transition toward democracy, insisting on absolute power and on retaining it indefinitely. Offered the chance to negotiate both freedom and wealth abroad, he opted for power at any price. Again, he assumed the US could pay lip-service to democracy and then revert to a stable if grudging acceptance of his dictatorship, content that he had no real international alignment with the East.

As a head of state and leading figure in narcotics, Noriega managed to make himself perhaps the principal target on that issue, but never seemed to have comprehended how extreme was his shift in position from valued anticommunist ally to drug czar. He was not capable of seeing himself slowly rising above the communist regimes as a political threat -- they seemed to the US both intractable opponents but declining threats.. Noriega was intractable but an increasing threat and an increasingly visible opponent, "perversely" attracting increasing attention but no action in the Hemisphere. Noriega's removal from power probably became tacit American policy from the date of his grand jury indictments. He exhibited a cultural mirroring of inconsistencies between stated and practiced norms, assuming American statements on narcotics were

for domestic consumption. He shared a widespread Latin American perception of the US as a degenerating culture (cf, highest percapita active church memberships in the world). It is one thing to reject another society's formal morality as posturing, but Noriega more than most should have realized the damage which the rising tide of narcotics was doing the US at home.

Any state would do well to examine its actions on a criterion that something is out of alignment when told that it is offending the law or norms of another state -- the very norms reflect perceived interests. Those interests admittedly come in hierarchies. Noriega had been a valued anti-communist ally of the US. Perhaps his crucial error was in not recognizing that with the declining perceived threat from communist expansionism he was no longer a scarce resource. In a monopolar world, other interests such as aiding democracy and suppressing narcotics came to the fore.

Balance/Evenhandedness: In explaining regional resistance to following a US lead on deposing Noriega, one must look to the multilateral version of the bipolarity phenomenon of playing the US off against the USSR. A good deal of Latin American foreign policy making is predicated on maintaining a regional version of nonalignment; a balance between positions which favor foreign policy goals of either superpower. This phenomenon extends even to contravening other expressed values such as democracy or fighting narcotics. The phenomenon will likely outlive Soviet world influence, with more veering leftward now justified in terms of not contravening nonaligned norms; the faultline will become North-South rather than East-West. The implications are the same for the US as a global power -- great consistency will be required in building consensus on what is acceptable interstate behavior.

Populism/The *Pueblo* in Arms: The next threat to the now-dominant electoral democracy being almost universally achieved in Latin America is not a return to military government but populism. The appeal to mildly irrational mass politics of the streets is interrelated with the normative feeling South of the border that progressive ideas need to be appealed to if not implemented. It

meshes well with any political need to seize power. Populism became the dominant form of political activity in Panama under military rule. Torrijos stirred up class politics against foreign business and the native oligarchy -- the elite was branded "cottontails". Noriega raised it to extremes with his rallies and Dignity Battalions. The xenophobia of these units led to the trigger events for the intervention, but their real causal relationship to the conflict was in the feedback loop: populist organizing cadre, media barrages, neighborhood structures, self-serving informers, shock troops and mass assemblages tend to convince their organizer that he has secured mass support. The illusion is heady. The leader who sets out to firm up control of his society is told he has it. There is, however, no objective test, short of domestic or international use of force against him. The populist dream is a nation rising as one to eject the challenger. Juan Peron would have passed the intervention test. Manuel Noriega flunked. His support had no depth or tenacity. Styling himself defender of his downtrodden people, Noriega stepped smartly away from reality. He armed the people, as had Arbenz in Guatemala. He rallied the masses regularly to steel them against invasion. He preached foreign exploitation and anti-Americanism in the best tradition of Juan Peron. He believed he had built an invasion-proof national mentality and military. It didn't work. As with the decade of American sanctions against Nicaragua, the people full well realized who had brought on the hardships of isolation from the world economy. The danger of the demonization of another state to consolidate internal power is that it forces people to choose between their leader and normal, productive relations with another state. They will not necessarily choose the leader. Certainly not if they perceive no malevolence by the other state. The US had made it clear to the Panamanian people, and indeed privately to the Guard, that its quarrel was with the policies and therefore with the person of Noriega. We had no intention of abrogating the Canal Treaties, punishing those in uniform, or taking over Panama. When the invasion came, the PDF resisted in some instances, but then in the face of a humane psychological operation either melted into civilian clothes or formally surrendered by pre-negotiation.

The Authoritarian Tradition: Latin America never lacked for democrats, but the betrayal of its revolutions was helped by the hierarchical nature of many of its institutions coupled with the tradition of nonintervention. Noriega built his dictatorship as the rest of the continent was democratizing. Critically, he missed the shift in which side the US was on. He may also have overread the fact that two military dictatorships of the Right lingered on in Latin America, Paraguay and Chile, missing the US perception that their regimes were in transition to democracy whether they knew it or not. He should have studied more closely the US perception that the real obstacles to the wave of democratization sweeping Latin America were two military dictatorships of the Left: the regimes in control of Managua and La Habana. Noriega himself helped the US keep pressure on the *Comandantes* and should have noted the US penchant for mixing values and politics. There is a temptation to translate regional tolerance of one's regime into global acceptability of one's state behavior. True as it may be, however, that regional security organizations have failed to keep the peace against regional aggressors, they have also provided no protection against extra-regional powers.

Holy Alliance: Tacitly invoking an *hispanidad* of the Left, Noriega seemed to feel increasingly free to consort openly with Cuba and Nicaragua. Indeed, he may have seen them as bulwarks. They had survived long-term opposition to the United States. The US had made major efforts to overthrow both Cuba and Nicaragua without results. He even seemed to envision an anti-American coalition as strengthening his position. Traditionally, as Guard G-2, Noriega had balanced his relationships with the US and Cuba. At a certain distance from the US, he seems to have judged that he had no choice but to shift over to the other side. Hardly capable of realizing how shallow his own populist efforts had been, he could not foresee the fall of *Sandinismo* when the Nicaraguan people were asked, or envision Fidel's continuing isolation as the last military dictator in the Americas.

"Fidelismo" -- The Immunizing Value of Defiance: Taking a general Latin American anti-Americanism from a static political posture to a prescription for action, Noriega sought confrontation on ever more bizarre grounds. This appeared to strike him as not only survivable but maximizing behavior -- it secured his apparent popularity at home, and it built a Latin consensus that any American action against him at all was illegitimate and poorly motivated. A leader who is antiamerican secures a special status in the region. (Fidel Castro "holding court" at the 1990 Brazilian inauguration, or Ortega at the UN, is a strikingly contradictory but almost calendrical spectacle in which professed democratic values are trampled in the rush to embrace regional particularism. Such a leader can be the only non-elected head of government present, but be lionized.) The more extreme a leader's defiance, the longer it continues, the better. US restraint is supposed, in this thought process, to be nearly limitless. The offending country's status as untouchable is built up, much as in biological immunization. Conversely, the more the United States takes, the more it must take because it is the prevailing relationship with the given state.

One Way Street: There is one unspoken but universal Latin American exception to the Estrada doctrine of *de facto* recognition: US recognition or support of a regime can be questioned and opposed if it is a regime of the Right. Conversely, US opposition to a regime of the Left is inherently flawed, morally and politically. This gave Noriega an incentive to paint his absolute dictatorship as a popular movement, paralleling the struggles of the Nicaraguan and Cuban peoples. As he had to murder opponents and nullify elections, Heroic Struggle became more and more his only excuse to hold power. Noriega escalated the bilateral tension beyond what the US would bear. Planning began for his ouster. While Latin governments were forced to condemn some of his actions, as they have Fidel's dictatorship, they can not bring themselves to take the side of the US against a Latin leader and could not call for Noriega's removal "under pressure" from the US.

Here, in the net of particular politico-cultural logic which Noriega considered as he shaped his strategy toward the US during 1989, we have the crux of the need for intervention: different views of the world lead countries to violate norms restricting the pursuit of national interest. They can also lead regional security organizations to become outward-looking arrangements which cannot address the problem of a member government whose behavior, internal and external, is illegitimate. While the particulars vary by region, the lack of universal norms is global. The clear heart of the question, however, is that Territorial Sovereignty has been redefined as paramount over the political sovereignty of peoples. Sovereignty, then, becomes the unquestionable right of a regime to exist and therefore to rule its people. The nation state represents the government, not the population. Self-determination, which gave birth to the Third World, has been suppressed there as secondary to territorial integrity or "national security". Under those rules of the game, Noriega seemed secure in the Fall of 1989 against external intervention.

How Not to Intervene: The October 1989 Coup

What of internal opposition? The US role in the last domestic opposition move is instructive. The American intervention in the abortive PDF "coup" against Noriega was too little too late. We paid a price in tipping our hand, gutting our standing with other potential PDF plotters and the democratic opposition, and momentarily adding to Noriega's apparent invincibility.

The United States had made it policy that Manuel Noriega must cease to govern Panama. The US had assured Panamanian military, including those in exile, that we bore the PDF as an institution no ill will, but that we insisted in civilian supremacy and democratic government under law in Panama.

When United States officials were informed that a military coup would be mounted against Noriega, President Bush agreed on October 2 that US forces would deny passage, where they controlled roads, to forces rushing to crush the coup. This appeared to be

minimal and useful aid to the plotters. It was consistent with our goal of removing Noriega yet did not seem to involve the USG as a coconspirator, possibly culpable in Noriega's death.

Yet the coup was flawed. The leader of the coup, Major Moises GIROLDI Vega, had a reputation as a Judas Goat - - he had earlier called for a rising which flushed many anti-Noriega officers to action and to their deaths. From the perspective of U.S. interests, he did not promise democracy and an end to PDF power, and might have simply perpetuated and indeed strengthened military dictatorship in Panama.

When the coup took place, on October 3, 1989, US roadblock positions were bypassed by the Panamanian forces coming to Noriega's rescue. The plotters were not told of this, as there was no means of contacting them. Nor was the White House told -- events were moving too rapidly. According to the widow of the coup leader, Giroldi's calls to numbers given him by US officers were not taken when he called. The coup faltered in its determination. Noriega, theoretically a prisoner and deposed, began communicating with the troops. He was not handed over to the United States -- even though the US armed forces had Presidential orders to receive him (for arrest and trial) and take him to a US base as long as no overt show of armed force were necessary. (Alternatively, they could receive him at a base where he handed over there. Only with further Presidential orders would they be authorized to sally forth to arrest Noriega.)

Time was on Noriega's side. He began to control events. Loyalists advanced to rescue him and make his captors realize that they were not a majority in the Guard.

The coup collapsed. It did so not because the US failed to support it but because of its own, internal contradictions: the military officers did not want to harm Noriega, asking him instead to resign and exile himself. With their leader held prisoner but alive, the plotters were surrounded and eventually talked into surrender. This tragicomic Ransom of Red Chief scenario ended

sadly as the leaders were tortured and executed, their followers imprisoned. In a wider followup to secure his position, Noriega began a country-wide crackdown on October 10. The opposition in Panama was gravely wounded. The not-avowedly democratic golpistas cost the democratic opposition dearly. They had lost sight of why Panamanians wanted Noriega out, concentrating on very limited demands in an all-or-nothing game in which their opponent was a master. They had forgotten Hugo Spadafora, the opposition Christian Democrat, beheaded and castrated on Noriega's orders.

In response to charges that the US had encouraged and then abandoned opponents of Noriega, US planners laid down clear guidelines for coup plotters and set up clear channels for communicating with them should they present themselves to the US Embassy or Southern Command. A clear authority to manage such a contingency was vested with the subcabinet Deputies Committee: the seconds in command at State, DOD, JCS and CIA. (Facts on File, Oct 13 1989, p.759 B1) It was too late, however, for the US to reestablish its credibility with the PDF. We were branded the coconspirator we were not. Our opponent was alerted to the extent of our hostility. Only a unique constellation of political prejudices and culturally-biased norms kept him from seeing whence the next blow would come. Our haphazard role convinced Noriega that the US impotent against him.

Intervention would have to be direct. As one can judge from contrasting the results of Guatemala '54, Bay of Pigs and the Contras with Santo Domingo, Grenada and Panama, overt military intervention is preferable to covert subversion not only for its direct effectiveness and controllability but because the political fallout has a shorter half-life.

When to Intervene: *Casus Belli*

The events which seemed causal in the Panama intervention were so because they foretold a pattern in bilateral relations which was not long-run viable for the United States. The shooting of one

military officer and the detention and menacing of another and his wife were illegal and contravened international norms. Nations have suffered worse. What necessitated intervention was that this was not only part of a pattern but of an escalatory pattern. Violent incidents with US forces were Noriega's "immunization" process, building his supposed support at home, reinforcing regional norms in Latin America.

The logical result in the special logic of the Latin political process would in the medium term be that continued base-related incidents disturbed harmony and good *de facto* relations. They also threatened Panamanian sovereignty as embodied by General Noriega. Since there is no presumption that a Latin head of Government can be changed by external forces, and he clearly suppressed internal forces, the necessary long-run regional conclusion would be that American forces must leave Panama, treaty or no treaty.

In this scenario, the Noriega regime would be free to select which crisis would take place between the US and Panama on a given day. Further, he could determine how far the event would go, what the level of violence would be, and at what level of seriousness Panamanian forces or agents would break off contact without fear of pursuit or consequences. In doing so, Noriega would be able to condition US, Latin and world opinion both to his version of events and to the longer term precedent that the US, as classic intervening or "colonial" power and indeed the creator of Panama from Colombia, should and must exercise infinite interstate "restraint"; must "take" whatever Noriega chose to dish out. Such a bilateral relationship was not stable or viable for the US.

For Noriega, the relationship of escalating conflict was the only hand to play. Since the death of the charismatic Torrijos, who ruled from 1968 through 1981, Noriega had exhausted negotiation on both continuing to rule and on handing over power and retiring in exile. He had planned and then aborted elections in 1984 and 1989 which showed him his support was shrinking not growing with the length of his rule. He found only one responsive chord with his population: a xenophobic nationalism and fear of external

threat which, with little depth in the population at large, could be generated at a given point in the context of a rally exploiting poor living conditions. It could be given muscle and sinew in the form of Dignity Battalions drawn from the bottom of the barrel.

Thus it was clear to all but Manuel Noriega that the United States intended to and would depose him. The US had tried unilaterally and multilaterally to negotiate his departure from office, was harboring the government to whom he had denied a ballot count, and building up its forces in his country. He was lulled by US restraint as regards the Nicaraguans and by US reserve in the October coup. His choice of strategy -- confrontation -- both convinced the US that the damage of the conflicting relationship had to be limited by the politically-expensive measure of intervention and provided the trigger events. Intervention came sooner than the US would have liked. Noriega had managed to convert all his strengths -- narcotics funding, his army, the poverty and anger of the people, the US pressure -- into weaknesses. It was time for the US to act.

"Insurgency" between Governments -- Scorpions in a Bottle

Noriega's war with the United States was also inevitable on an internal logic: The relationship between the US and his confrontationalist Panamanian government was not sovereign. The US had (through the political sacrifice of control of the Canal in perpetuity) made considerable concessions in order to keep US forces in Panama until the end of December 1999. The Canal Treaties also gave the US the right to defend the neutrality of the Canal in the 21st Century.

Thus, Noriega's choice of a domestic survival mechanism (escalating confrontation) doomed him. The US could not, consistent with national honor and major previous concessions to Panamanian sovereignty, keep accepting political "wins" by Noriega. While he seemed only to be counting *coup*, never drawing blood, he was menacing US forces and the Canal. Beyond the "immunization" effect, there would eventually have come a point where Noriega

ordered troops or mobs onto US bases. To permit the neutralization or worse of US forces, especially those defending the Canal when it was only a decade from full Panamanian control, would have been politically impossible.

Noriega and the US were bound to each other within the space of the country which contains the Panama Canal. They were also bound to each other across time ... for a decade more. The difference between the two parties to the dispute was that Noriega could not live with the deal as the US envisioned it -- a calm, rational and harmonious transition to Panamanian operation under guaranteed neutrality and universal access, with a stable and democratic Panama. Noriega could at one point have reverted to being solely Commander of the PDF, but that scenario would have left his income limited to some minor percentage of the PDF budget -- nothing like the Guard's narcotics income. More importantly to Noriega personally, his power and place on the Hemispheric stage would have been reduced geometrically.

By December, 1989, US desire to remove Noriega from power had failed as a political policy. The US had even tried to get the OAS to take on this disgrace to a democratizing Continent. The OAS too failed and abdicated. Noriega had engineered a steady-state stalemate. He was seemingly buttressed against domestic and foreign opponents. His fellow Latin democracies felt powerless against him under their collective normative constraints against "intervention." He had foxed the US at every turn and built up revenues to keep the PDF following him even as the population suffered economic boycott and escrowing of Canal revenues. Manuel Noriega had defied the United States and beaten the US politically -- no mean feat. He could not, however, leave it at that.

Less-than-International War -- Insurgency by a Host Government

Noriega took his international "defense" against the US to the home front. He felt compelled at home to both show and extend his defeat of US objectives. In doing so, he increased the stakes. Escalation seemed safer. It offered the advantage of transforming

one symbol into another. He could turn his domestically-terrorist, narco-linked symbol of what the US thought was wrong in Latin America ... into a campaign of the "little people" of the Americas against the imperialist intervenor from the North.

Thus Noriega's anti-US posturing and actions became analogous to an insurgency: He sought to change a power relationship which on the local scene (within Panamanian borders) and for the medium term (through 2000 A.D.) pitted his government against a US which (originally) simply wanted to preserve the *status quo*. Unwilling to live with a power relationship which Noriega deemed unlikely to advance his cause, and unable to seek equalizing resources or power elsewhere (The Medellin Cartel and Nicaragua were both under siege), one political entity in a geographic space defined its very existence in terms of defeating another which advocated the sharing of power for the present within that space. The "insurgency" was on in Panama: weakened host government vs. strong base-rights country.

Like a true insurgent, Noriega denied the legitimacy of the more powerful contender. In the best tradition of Mao, he based his revolt (nominally) on the People. He sketched out a campaign which was more psychological than military. Denigrating the might and right claimed by the US, Noriega unintentionally strengthened each. Like an insurgent, he managed to create the state of confrontation which the "ruling" party to the dispute wished would go away. He defined the means and the ends in much more cataclysmic terms than the established party wanted to give to the game. He added ideology to a contest of interests. He escalated when the more powerful enemy wanted to talk. He seized the tactical initiative. He carried the war home to the "oppressor" when the oppressor didn't wish to engage. In the end, Noriega went so far as to declare that Panama was at war with the United States, escalating the insurgency naturally toward the "final stage". Then Noriega joined the best insurgent tradition -- he lost when the irregular campaign escalated to the conventional level.

Just War, Diplomacy and Intervention

There is no doubt that the United States considered military action against Noriega for months if not years. Its hands were tied by many norms, domestic and external. Perhaps the most intuitive and time-honored restraint is that one not move easily to force. The Western tradition of Just War Doctrine includes the principle of last resort -- diplomacy must be exhausted as a precondition to force. The United States had indeed tried to negotiate Noriega's return of power to those who won it at the ballot box. All negotiations, open and clandestine, bilateral and multilateral, failed. To America's advantage, the OAS tried and failed before we intervened, muting the regular criticism that the regional organization should deal with violations of international norms. Here, though, was another warning. Noriega gloated that he had held to his extreme conditions -- essentially being allowed to run his empire from behind the scenes in Panama or Cuba. He should have known Americans well enough to know that he had exhausted the patience and inflamed moral outrage. Foreign policy is not all treaties and warheads. Noriega had allowed the US to in effect paint itself into a corner with statements of his unacceptability, provided provocation rather than backing away from conflict, and eventually helped his opponent feel we had met the "last resort" criterion on use of force.

Defining The Mission: System Change *versus* Regime Change --

The Case for Pro-active Support of Democracy

American interventions in the Dominican Republic, Grenada and Panama point in a useful policy direction on the politics of intervention. They stand in sharp contrast with interventions *not* in support of electoral democracy. They are more likely to yield longer-term success -- stability, elections, openness to American views, convergence of perceived national interests.

A grand strategy which seeks to ensure the survival and prosperity of the US would be well served by renewed emphasis on political goals and military strategy and forces which,

rather than pulling back in proportion to communist withdrawal from responsibility and influence, fill the resulting vacuum by continuing to promote democratic systems. Rather than contenting ourselves with having fostered the "mainstream" political system in the North and West, we should share the resulting freedom and prosperity with the East and South. The strategy would call for leading by example not force, but remaining willing to apply force selectively and deftly when it can foster democracy --- not only when a more concrete geopolitical interest is menaced but also preemptively when a society which could be democratic goes into a critical period.

This implies a ready will, significant domestic consensus and finely-honed intervention capabilities. The commitment is deeper than a stabilization of a society out of balance just to, say, protect foreigners ashore. Expelling Manuel Noriega from power was inextricably linked with ending PDF rule of Panama and installing the rightful government. After two decades, the PDF was so deeply ingrained in Panamanian life that systemic change, not simply a change in regime (as had been offered months before by the coup) was needed. As in Grenada, what was required was system rather than regime change ... a new politics, not just a new politician. Further, nationbuilding had to flow from the invasion smoothly and immediately were it to be a success. Followup is vital if we are to intervene successfully. Public security is key, immediately against fanatical loyalists; more widely against a general backsliding into the infinite vice of the go-go era of political corruption in Panama. The new system and government need to be assisted to maturation. Aid is basic. Prosperity is as important as security.

There is a global lesson here: we have too often been content to change regimes rather than political systems. Systemic change seemed too big a job or too culturally immodest. Guatemala showed us that if one is to intervene, you may as well get your money's worth -- to this day, the smouldering racial war between government and governed continues in the hills -- not our fault, but more within our ability to influence in 1954 than now.

Clearly, from the perspective of our domestic context, American values and domestic opinion point toward securing or installing only democratic regimes. We have the luxury with the decline of Soviet reach and interest in the wider world of sticking to our principles. Such a firm choice would also advance our purely geostrategic interests:

-- Efforts in the tradition of the US efforts at installing elected, politically-responsive systems of government in the Dominican Republic, Grenada and Panama would incrementally secure the longer-run interest in a more just and therefore more stable world order.

-- By consistently backing electoral democracy and human rights, militarily as well as politically, we can secure a net trendline. Whether by invitation of a faltering government or alone or collectively against a repressive regime, we can minimize the need to intervene as often. Global politics is fast to pick out trends. In 1970, 90 percent of Latin America lived under dictatorships. Today nearly the whole continent is electing its leaders. The Subcontinent has Pakistan as well as India in the democratic fold again and is marginally the more stable for it. With the same trend clear in Eastern Europe, even South Africa senses something in the air. The setback in China is itself testimony to a popular politics changing expectations from the Philippines to the Baltics through the Balkans. More countries enjoy an unquestionable degree of political freedom than must now be called "partly free". Many of the partly free must now be thought of as liberalizing. Either group now outnumbers nations firmly not free.

-- Not that we need always or easily commit forces. In a somewhat monopolar world, we can exercise more patience and more longer-term pressure, especially trade sanctions and even blockades rather than going ashore.

-- When we must intervene, a smaller set of global bases and transit rights, arrived at with democracies less inclined to restrict our purposes, transit and use rights would give us more usable reach. Solid allies, not casting an eye to the Soviets and not concerned with US inconsistency on the subject of electing one's leaders, would be less inclined to challenge turning the screws on repressive or outlaw regimes.

-- A consistent backing of democracy could also make intervention more widely accepted. We shall be redrafting not just state practice but customary norms under international law -- building case law event by event as the world accepts the disinterested character of the intervenor who does not stay to occupy or exploit. Without saying so, the US would stand in for the original role of the UN Security Council.

- - We might even get more real partners willing to join us in making or securing interventions, as in Santo Domingo. There should be concrete payback in transit and support, hopefully in regional intelligence. Longer run, as single members took up their real responsibilities for the peace rather than hiding behind *de facto* recognition and territorial sovereignty, the challenge to regional organizations would come clear: should they not do the job, we and others with an interest in regional security will.

Such a strategy would maximize the national survival and prosperity. Where we have an opportunity for influence by intervention, democracies would get preference. Where we had to intervene, system change would be the goal. This is a longer-run but more solid way to craft an international system in which other nation's interests tend to be more parallel to ours. The mobile, highly-lethal conventional forces which we shall need anyway in the next century would have a political multiplier effect on the Grenada/Panama model far beyond their ability to secure and hold territory.